

HOW TO CONTAIN IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN THE LEVANT

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL SHAWN M. NILIUS
United States Army

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:

Approved for Public Release.
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 2011

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

| REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE | | | | Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188 | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS. | | | | | |
| 1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-03-2011 | | 2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project | | 3. DATES COVERED (From - To) | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE How to Contain Iranian Influence in the Levant | | | | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5b. GRANT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel Shawn M. Nilius | | | | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5e. TASK NUMBER | |
| | | | | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Dick Winslow Center for Strategic Leadership | | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013 | | | | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) | |
| | | | | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Unlimited | | | | | |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | | | |
| 14. ABSTRACT The current U.S. policy has failed to curb Tehran's appetite in the Levant. How do we contain or turn the tide of Iranian influence in the Levant, specifically toward Syria, Lebanon and the Occupied Territories? The Iranian regime continues to sustain its influence in the Levant through diplomatic, information, military, and economic means (DIME). This approach by Iran has not gone unnoticed by the United States; however, current U.S. policy has not curtailed or reversed Tehran's influence. Will the United States change its current Levant policy to contain and reverse the existing Iranian influence in the Levant? To frame this question, the project examines the current U.S. policy in the Levant; the current Iranian policy in the Levant; identifies the amount of aid/support both the United States and Iran provide to the Levant; and tries to quantify the effectiveness of the current U.S. policy. In conclusion, policy options will be identified for recommendation to curb Iranian influence. | | | | | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS U.S. National Interests, U.S. Policy, Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, Palestinians, West Bank, Gaza, Foreign Policy | | | | | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: Unclassified | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES 32 | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON |
| a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED | b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED | c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED | | | 19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) |

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

HOW TO CONTAIN IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN THE LEVANT

By

Lieutenant Colonel Shawn M. Nilius
United States Army

Dr. Dick Winslow
Project Adviser

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Shawn M. Nilius

TITLE: How to Contain Iranian Influence in the Levant

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 10 March 2011 WORD COUNT: 7,016 PAGES: 32

KEY TERMS: U.S. National Interests, U.S. Policy, Middle East, Lebanon, Syria, Palestinians, West Bank, Gaza, Foreign Policy

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The current U.S. policy has failed to curb Tehran's appetite in the Levant. How do we contain or turn the tide of Iranian influence in the Levant, specifically toward Syria, Lebanon and the Occupied Territories? The Iranian regime continues to sustain its influence in the Levant through diplomatic, information, military, and economic means (DIME). This approach by Iran has not gone unnoticed by the United States; however, current U.S. policy has not curtailed or reversed Tehran's influence. Will the United States change its current Levant policy to contain and reverse the existing Iranian influence in the Levant? To frame this question, the project examines the current U.S. policy in the Levant; the current Iranian policy in the Levant; identifies the amount of aid/support both the United States and Iran provide to the Levant; and tries to quantify the effectiveness of the current U.S. policy. In conclusion, policy options will be identified for recommendation to curb Iranian influence.

HOW TO CONTAIN IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN THE LEVANT

How do we contain or turn the tide of Iranian influence in the Levant, specifically toward Syria, Lebanon and the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza)? Over the last six years I have witnessed the Iranian regime improve its influence in the Levant through diplomatic, information, military and economic means (DIME). This approach by Iran has not gone unnoticed by the United States; however, the current U.S. policy has not curtailed or reversed Tehran's influence. The current U.S. policy toward Iran focuses on efforts to contain or isolate it. Neither approach has provided the results the U.S. strategy calls for; the overall policy toward Iran has failed to accomplish the desired results the U.S. Government (USG) seeks.

Meanwhile, the United States continues to support our primary ally in the region, Israel, but has not put forth the same effort to entice Syria, Lebanon or the Palestinians away from Tehran.¹ What limited effort has been applied to entice or persuade Syria, Lebanon or the Palestinians away from Iran has had little to no affect. In the case of Syria, U.S. actions have driven Damascus closer to Tehran by continued U.S. legislative provisions and executive directives.² Support to Lebanese Hezbollah and some Palestinian elements is expanding, albeit at a slow pace.³ This paper will address why the current U.S. policy toward the Levant needs to change and will provide recommendations for a new policy.

Background

In the past decade the Iranian regime, led by hardliners and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has expanded its influence in the Levant via direct ties to the Syrian regime, Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian rejectionist groups, Hamas, the

Palestinian Resistance Group (PRC) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). These three strategic ties into the Levant have enabled Iran to play a major role in what does and does not take place in the region. Continued ties through funding and arming of these groups are critical elements of Iran's foreign policy that continue to expand. This effort by Iran is counterproductive to the U.S. policy for the Levant.

Meanwhile, the U.S. effort in the Levant to curb Iran's influence has had limited affect to turn this strategically important area toward a more peaceful region safe from terrorism. U.S. efforts to counter Iran's foreign policy to date have reduced our relations with Syria and, while there is success in the West Bank to support the Palestinians, there is limited support to Gaza due to our relative lack of access in the Gaza Strip since mid 2007 and a corresponding increase in Iranian influence there via its Palestinian surrogates. While U.S. efforts to improve relations with the Lebanese government are increasing, the relationship between Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah has increased more, making the U.S. effort limited in comparison.

The following details are provided to compare the Iranian efforts in the Levant to U.S. efforts.

Iranian Efforts in the Levant

Iran continues to increase its regional power by expanding ties with its neighbors via diplomatic and economic activities, and active sponsorship of terrorist and paramilitary groups.⁴ This policy for Tehran is specifically tied to Syria, Lebanon, and the West Bank and Gaza and is a microcosm of Tehran's broader foreign policy strategy.⁵ The policy is intended to use these elements when Iran needs support but it is unknown to what extent these allies would support any or all of Iran's requests when

needed. However, without the cash, arms and diplomatic support Iran probably would have less support in the Levant than it does today.

Iran executes its policy in the Levant by providing the following aid/support to the following governments and/or groups. Although Iran does not direct these governments or groups on their daily operations, Tehran does expect some support when needed or requested.

Iranian Aid/Support to Syria. Iran's relations with Damascus have grown since July 2007 when President Asad and President Ahmadinejad declared that "Iran and Syria were, are, and shall be brothers and allies."⁶ Damascus considers cooperation with Iran as a major principle of its foreign policy and for over 30 years Iran and Syria have had close relations. Both have built a relationship based on shared strategic interests, not cultural or religious empathy and although Syria is by far the junior partner in the relationship, both have benefitted greatly based on their self described "axis of resistance" by their non-state actors Hezbollah and Hamas.⁷

Syria as a whole is a weak state requiring Damascus to use Lebanese Hezbollah to conduct and execute part of its foreign policy and achieve its goals of maintaining control of Lebanon, either directly or indirectly, the return of the Golan Heights from Israel and a favorable resolution to the Palestinian issue. To support these efforts, Damascus needs the support of Hezbollah to influence Lebanon and Israel and needs the Palestinian rejectionist groups to help sustain pressure to resolve the Palestinian issue favorably. Tehran understands this and uses its relationship with Damascus to drive its own foreign policy goals for the Levant region.

Both Tehran and Damascus use a wide variety of information means to show the strength of their relationship against the United States and Israel. The similar and mutually supporting public statements coming out of both Damascus and Tehran are no coincidence.

Both countries collaborate and cooperate militarily by having a Joint Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) station and a Regional Headquarters in Syria. Weapons transfers between the two countries occur regularly and Syria is the middle man for passing weapons from Tehran to Hezbollah. This relationship through Syria to Hezbollah allows Tehran to have considerable influence into the Levant and assists Damascus in its efforts to influence Lebanon. Syria allows key facilitators of Tehran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to pass through Damascus into Lebanon with little to no restrictions.

Information on the economic relationship between the two countries is limited, but with Syria's lack of wealth any additional income garnered for Damascus is appreciated. This includes monies that Syria acquires from its role as facilitator of Iran's monies through and to Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, Iran has expanded its trade efforts with Syria and is attempting to open up a joint Iranian-Syrian bank, possibly involving Bank Saderat and the Commercial Bank of Syria, entities which have both been sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Treasury. According to the *Economist*, Iranian trade with Syria is between \$160-400 million annually and is much more significant for Syria than for Iran.

Iranian Aid/Support to Lebanon. Iran's major connection to Lebanon is through its professed proxy of Lebanese Hezbollah. Tehran uses this proxy, both the military

and political wings of Hezbollah, to expand its influence in Lebanon. Iran seems to turn on and turn off its public diplomatic efforts into Lebanon based on what supports Tehran's goals and those of Lebanese Hezbollah. In the wake of the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, Tehran has once again improved its position. While the relationship between Tehran and Damascus is well, the reduction of Syrian influence inside Lebanon has allowed Iran to expand its role in Lebanon beyond what it was when operating solely through Damascus. This effort was most recently noted when Iran supported Hezbollah in its efforts to counter the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006.

The recent visit by the Iranian President Ahmadinejad to Lebanon is another element of Iran expanding its influence in the Levant, using both the diplomatic and information element of power. Although this was the Iranian president's first visit to Lebanon since taking office in 2005, the visit marks a long and lasting relationship between the two. Iran's relationship with Lebanon and its proxies goes back as far as the Islamic Revolution of 1979, and the building of Hezbollah in 1982. Both Tehran and Damascus found a "militant proxy" in Hezbollah, allowing Damascus to influence Lebanon against Israel and allowing Tehran to export its Islamic Revolution into the Arab world.

The endeavor to support Hezbollah is divided between Damascus and Tehran. Iran is responsible for funding, training and enforcing Hezbollah's ideology through the IRGC.⁸ Also, Tehran uses Damascus to help set the conditions for Iran by permitting IRGC officers, such as Ahmadinejad in the 1980s, to set up training camps inside Lebanon and to secure a supply line of arms to Hezbollah.

The military relationship between Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah is well documented. The level of detail and exact quantities of arms provided by Tehran via Damascus is publicly limited. Estimates of support from Iran to Hezbollah include, but are not limited to, tens of thousands of Katyusha rockets, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), C-802 sea-skimming missiles, and Fajr and Khaybar series of rockets.⁹ One thing is for certain, Tehran is and will continue to be the largest supplier of arms to Hezbollah and Hezbollah knows that. This allows Iran to have influence over Hezbollah although not necessarily having complete authoritative control over Hezbollah's military wing.

Economic support to Lebanon is estimated between \$197 million in 2007 to \$247 million in 2008.¹⁰ Both countries currently have a joint economic commission to assist them in expanding their economic bilateral ties. These statistics do not include any of the estimated \$600 million in support Iran provides to Hezbollah. Indications are that Tehran would like to expand its economic influence in Lebanon to include non-Shiites.

Iranian Aid/Support to Palestinians (West Bank and Gaza). While most Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority leadership have rejected any support from Iran, Iran's influence has significantly changed in the last decade, most notably in the Gaza Strip where Tehran has steadily increased the amount of financial, training and logistical aid to the Palestinian rejectionist groups. With the passing of Palestinian Leader Yasser Arafat, who opposed Iranian efforts to establish a toehold in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Palestinian rejectionist groups are now open to receiving support from Tehran.

Diplomatically Palestinians are divided between the West (U.S.) and Iran. The current Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, has clear and strong ties to the West and Abbas opposes ties to Iran and its efforts to meddle in Palestinian politics. Some Palestinian rejectionists believe support from Iran provides a measure of leverage against Israel that the West is unlikely to provide. Iran's best efforts to influence Palestinians appear to be tied to its increasing support to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. By supporting Hamas Tehran expands its influence in the region to include with the Palestinian Authority by allowing Hamas more autonomy over the Palestinian issues in the Gaza Strip. However, the PA in the West Bank is adamantly against giving Hamas more autonomy and has been engaged in an extended campaign to confine Hamas' influence. The Gaza Strip is another story; there the PA in reality has little genuine influence these days and has effectively ceded control to Hamas. Hamas retains some leadership in Damascus that has direct ties back to Iran. This leadership-in-exile provides flexibility for Hamas in dealing with the West while maintaining ties to Iran.

Iran uses the Information element of power by publicly proclaiming the Muslim world is "duty-bound" to help Palestinians defend their homeland. By focusing on the plight of the Palestinians, Iran continues to influence the strategic communications battle with the West and extend its influence in the region.¹¹ The United States, on the other hand, has increased its efforts to influence Palestinian public opinion and has worked closely with the Palestinian Authority to help shape public attitudes and counter anti-PA rhetoric. It remains to be seen which camp will prevail in this endeavor.

It is clear that Iran over the past several years has increased its lethal aid to Hamas. Tehran passes military aid to Palestinian rejectionist groups via land through

Sudan to Egypt and through the Sinai to be smuggled through tunnels into the Gaza Strip and via the sea as highlighted by the January 2009 shipment of weapons to Hamas aboard the *Monchegorsk*.¹² Iran provides this military aid for influence in the region and to attack Israel indirectly via Palestinian rejectionist groups. Iran is using the same model it uses with Lebanese Hezbollah; an effort that continues to expand.

Because of the controlling nature of Israel, economic ties to Iran are limited and therefore Palestinians do not conduct formal trade with Iran. However, Iran smuggles weapons, cash, and contraband into the Gaza Strip and provides training for Hamas militants; reports indicate this illicit aid provided by Iran ranges from \$20-30 million annually. The deputy leader of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Qassem, admitted to the *Financial Times* in May 2009 that his organization provided the Palestinians in Gaza with "every type of support" possible.¹³

U.S. Efforts in the Levant

The current U.S. policy for the Levant is mixed and will require several different explanations. The overall policy for the Levant is more a collection of bilateral policies toward each of the countries or elements in the region than a coherent policy toward the region as a whole.

U.S. Aid/Support to Syria. The U.S. relationship with the current Syrian regime continues to decline. The current U.S. policy and continued frustration with the Asad regime has pushed Syrian Arab Republic Government (SARG) away from the West and more into the Iranian camp. Iran continues to expand its relationship, as previously noted, while U.S. efforts have been reduced or have become negative efforts.

In the diplomatic arena the United States has only recently in early 2011 returned an Ambassador to Damascus, following the 2004 recall of its ambassador. While many

will say the removal of the Ambassador was the appropriate measure to send a sharp message to the Asad regime what it accomplished is to move the Syrians closer to Tehran. Without an Ambassador the United States has relied upon its chargé d'affaires and third country elements to present U.S. concerns to the SARG. It also sends a signal to Damascus that the United States is currently not interested in significant direct talks; a formula that has provided no new results.

The information relationship between the USG and the SARG has been affected over the past six years by the removal of the U.S. Ambassador and the legal actions taken by the USG against Damascus. With no U.S. Ambassador the ability for the United States to have open dialogue with senior Syrian officials has been limited. While the chargé d'affaires has been running the embassy throughout the ambassador's absence, his efforts have been at a lower level. As described earlier, without an Ambassador, the U.S. message for the SARG has been limited to medium and lower level dealings. Based on the current relationship between the two the information element is failing.

There is currently no formal relationship between the SARG and the U.S. military. Recent relations were developed along the Syria-Iraq border and most of those connections were based on the U.S. and Iraqi concerns with the flow of foreign fighters coming from Syria into Iraq, threatening Iraqi sovereignty. Border incidents resulted in several appalling scenarios that affected the relationship to where today there is no relationship between the two militaries.

Economic relations between the United States and the SARG are limited to assisting Palestinians and Iraqi refugees in Syria.¹⁴ In FY 2009 the Syrians did receive

\$2,500,000 from the U.S. Economic Support Fund (ESF). However, no money was awarded for FY 2010 and none is planned for FY 2011.¹⁵ Financial efforts to persuade Syria to cooperate with the West have led to U.S. legislative provisions and executive directives targeting the Asad regime.¹⁶ Additionally, the USG has imposed the Syria Accountability Act (SAA) of 2004, which prohibits the export of most goods containing more than 10% U.S.-manufactured component parts to Syria, and levied sanctions specifically against the Commercial Bank of Syria in 2006. There are also many Executive Orders from the President that specifically deny certain Syrian citizens and entities access to the U.S. financial system due to their participation in proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and association with terrorism; or destabilizing activities in Iraq and Lebanon.¹⁷

U.S. Aid/Support to Lebanon. The U.S. relationship with the Government of Lebanon has and continues to improve. Much of this improvement has taken place with the U.S. efforts to remove Syria from Lebanon. This support for the independence of Lebanon in the wake of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri's assassination has been a critical element of moving Lebanon away from Tehran.¹⁸ However, the Iranian influence continues in its efforts to support Lebanese Hezbollah.

Diplomatically the United States has and continues to entice Beirut away from Tehran and more toward the West. These efforts, a major increase over the last few years, are increasing but not at a rate to counter what Tehran is currently providing.

The United States continues to lose the information war despite efforts to remove Syria from Lebanon while supporting the democratically-elected government of Lebanon. While this effort is an improvement over past U.S. efforts it is limited in

comparison to what Tehran is providing both financially and in the use of the information element of national power. Iran's efforts are publicly known by providing support to Lebanon to use against Beirut's number one threat, Israel, a strategy that supports all aspects of Lebanon.¹⁹

The United States is expanding its military aid and relations with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Since 1993 the United States has resumed its International Military Education and Training program to support the LAF. Security assistance has increased to over \$1 billion since 2006 all in an effort to allow Lebanon to secure its own borders.

Economically the United States has identified the need for more support to the new government of Lebanon. Steps taken so far can be seen in the financial efforts over the past few years to support Lebanon's democratic process. In FY 2009 Lebanon received U.S. funding to support Basic Education Funding, Higher Education Funding and Direct Trade Capacity funding. The FY 2009 support was \$138,578,000. For FY 2010 the amount increased to \$238,300,000 and will increase to \$246,300,000 for FY 2011. Although the direction of economic support is increasing, the amount needed to support Lebanon and counter Iran is much higher.

The biggest concern of the U.S. efforts in Lebanon and for the Levant is the role of Lebanese Hezbollah. The United States is very careful to support the new government of Lebanon, but is very concerned with the role of Lebanese Hezbollah, both militarily and politically. The current situation in Lebanon may affect the amount of aid the United States will continue to provide if and/or when Lebanese Hezbollah increases its political role in the official Lebanese Government.

U.S. Aid/Support to Palestinians (West Bank and Gaza). The current U.S. diplomatic effort toward the Palestinians is very low-key. This subdued effort tries to balance both the U.S. diplomatic relations with Israel and Israeli influence over Palestinian National Security Forces (PNSF) and its concerns over PNSF developing future military/paramilitary capabilities that could potentially threaten Israel's security. While signs indicate that the Israelis are pleased with the increased professional efforts of the PNSF, it remains to be seen how much more military/paramilitary development Israel will allow.

This modest endeavor limits U.S. efforts in the information element of national power. Balancing Israel's desires for a limited Palestinian armed capability and what is needed to provide real security to the Palestinians is a delicate balance. Because of this the USG has limited its public information effort, choosing to retain the current imbalance.

There is currently a very limited U.S. role in military support for the Palestinians. The United States has a senior military representative (Lieutenant General Michael R. Moeller, USAF) who is the U.S. Security Coordinator (USSC), a position created in 2005, and who has the responsibility to help reform, train and equip the PNSF. This effort focuses on training Palestinian National Security Forces but has no say in the training of the PA civilian security forces, which are much more influential than the PNSF. Currently this effort has trained over 400 Presidential Guardsmen and 1,700 PNSF troops. The United States has apportioned over \$33 million toward these training activities. While this effort is an impressive endeavor, it has some very valid concerns. Some of these concerns are: will this short-term operational success turn into a

permanent defactionalized force that can provide broader criminal justice? Can this occur with the political landscape imbalance? Can these efforts off-set Iranian efforts, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where U.S. efforts to bolster the Palestinian Authority have been virtually non-existent since mid-2007?²⁰

Economically in FY 2009 the West Bank and Gaza received U.S. funding to support Basic Education, Maternal and Child Health funding, Higher Education funding, Microenterprise - Microfinance funding, Direct Trade capacity and Water funding. The FY 2009 support was \$117,515,000. For FY 2010 the amount increased to \$502,900,000 and will increase further to \$550,400,000 for FY 2011.²¹

U.S. Aid/Support to Israel. Overall U.S. support to Israel far exceeds all other efforts in the Levant combined. While this is critical in supporting our Israeli ally, it also alienates the other countries in the Levant. Diplomatically, Israel is our number one ally in the region and the USG makes that very clear, both internationally and domestically via our information element of national power. Militarily, the United States has bilateral relations at all levels with Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and provides more than \$2 billion in military grants annually. While the USG economic grants have reduced over the past decade, the overall financial support to Israel over the past decade exceeds \$26 billion.²²

Current U.S. Strategy

The current environment in the Middle East has several actors that influence the advancement of U.S. National Interests. The May 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) provides both a vision for the Middle East and specifics for dealing with Iran; a major threat to the United States and its allies in the Middle East. The current U.S. strategy for Iran, as defined in the May 2010 NSS, is that of containment; "increase their

isolation and bring them into compliance with international nonproliferation norms."²³

And, "yet if the Iranian Government continues to refuse to live up to its international obligations, it will face greater isolation."²⁴ This strategy of isolation is the current U.S. strategy and has been since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Additionally, the NSS breaks down the specific threats Iran poses by calling for "the transformation of Iranian policy away from its pursuit of nuclear weapons, support for terrorism, and threats against its neighbors; nonproliferation; and counterterrorism cooperation, access to energy, and integration of the region into global markets."²⁵ This current strategy lumps all these factors into one policy of containment; focusing more on Iran and less on the countries of the Levant that need U.S. support; Israel being the only exception.

Using the Feasibility, Acceptability, and Suitability (FAS) test of the Strategy Formulation Model I will assess the current U.S. strategy toward Iran and provide specifics on why I assess that this strategy fails the FAS test, the risk assessment involved in continuing with this current strategy and provide a recommended strategy for the future.²⁶

Background. U.S. and Iranian relations since the 1979 Islamic Revolution have been stalled. The major concern for the United States of all the issues identified is that of nuclear proliferation. While I agree that nuclear proliferation is by far the most important concern the United States has with Iran, it is not the only issue. The other issues identified in the 2010 NSS are terrorism, threats against its neighbors, access to energy, integration of the region into global markets, expansion of Iranian influence throughout the Arab World, and Iranian citizen's rights. At the current time none of

these other important national interests are being addressed either with Iran or any of the Levantine countries affected.

The current Ends for dealing with Tehran are an Iran that does not possess nuclear weapons, that does not support terrorism or export the Islamic Revolution, that does not pose a threat to its neighbors and that respects the universal human rights of its citizens. Forcing Iran to make a "clear choice" to not develop nuclear weapons is the most urgent and probably the most important of those ends. By meeting its "international obligations" Iran will be provided an opportunity to move away from isolation and become a greater member in the international political and economic arenas.²⁷ This End focuses on the isolation and containment of Iran with all vigor tied to the main endeavor of nuclear proliferation. While it is understandable why the nuclear issue is the top priority, the efforts to proceed on other areas of concern are halted while we wait for the nuclear issue to be resolved.

The Ways identified in the NSS are for the use of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to hold Iran accountable for its actions. This treaty is the accepted world standard used to enforce the ban of nuclear weapons while allowing for the peaceful use of nuclear power. However, the NPT has no real enforcement mechanism unless the international community works together to pressure Iran and others to follow these defined rules.

The Means to stop Iran requires the use of other elements of national power. The current primary focus is on economic power. By using economic sanctions the United States is trying to force Iran to play by international rules. For Tehran to follow these rules the sanctions must be followed by all of the major parties involved who deal

with Iran. This includes the main powers of China and Russia. While the United States has been able to receive some support from both, the effort to convince China and Russia that economic sanctions, which will affect both countries financially, is the right thing to do is still pending their decision to fully support. Securing this support from both China and Russia is the crucial factor in the success or failure of the U.S. strategy.

The diplomatic element of national power is also a valid tool (means) that must be used to ensure Tehran gets a clear and concise message from the United States and the international community. The message must be that Tehran abides by the rules set out in the NPT or faces further isolation and economic hardship. This current effort ties the diplomatic element of national power back into the economic element. Current U.S. efforts supporting the diplomatic element are being conducted by third parties and the international community.

The informational element as a means to force Iran to follow established international rules is crucial to ensuring Tehran is receiving a clear message from the international community on its responsibilities to be a good neighbor in the Middle East and to reduce the threat it poses on its neighbors and the world; the Levant included.

Effectiveness. For the current U.S. Strategy to be successful, it needs to pass the FAS test. The *Feasibility* of this strategy is can the option be accomplished within the contemplated time? Since time is the unknown and the strategy focuses on Iran having a nuclear capability, time must be equal to the time needed for Tehran to produce a nuclear capability. Many experts have discussed when Iran could be nuclear capable and those dates range from no earlier than 2013 to 2015.²⁸ Using this timeline the U.S. strategy has a minimum of three years to produce the results requested by the

NSS. My assessment of the feasibility is that the United States and the international community still do not have a comprehensive strategy that all can agree to. While the resources to execute the strategy do exist, getting all of the international partners to agree to use those resources has not been achieved.

By using the economic instrument of power as the main effort, the United States is relying on the willingness of China and Russia to support the full range of economic sanctions needed to force Iran to comply with the NPT. Given the current state of the world economy, neither Russia nor China will agree to economic sanctions required to bring Tehran in-line. China's major worries are its need for energy (oil) to continue its economic boom. With Iran having a large oil reservoir, it makes the choice for China too difficult to agree to the full use of economic sanctions. As for Russia, the trade and work that Russia is doing with Iran, to include the nuclear plant deal, is critical for income for Moscow. While the United States has been successful in convincing Russia to not sell advanced air-defense weapons to Tehran, the loss of other economic relations may affect Russia too greatly to convince Moscow to agree to the needed economic sanctions.

The enormous risk in the feasibility portion of the FAS test is the reliance on others, Russia and China, to agree to the full economic sanctions needed to be successful. While I agree the resources and capabilities are available to restrict Iran's efforts to become a nuclear capable country, without both Russia and China agreeing to the use of all economic sanctions within the next few years, the Feasibility portion of this strategy fails.

The diplomatic element of national power is critical to the success of economic sanctions. The international community needs to ensure that Tehran clearly understands what the world expects from Iran to guarantee compliance with international law and the required steps it needs to take to remove itself from isolation and economic hardship. While the diplomatic element is feasible its success could be increased with support from other countries in the region.

The information element of national power is a supporting effort to both the diplomatic and economic elements. The focus here needs to be on Tehran understanding what the international community expects from it and the steps Tehran can take to be in compliance with international law. At this time it is unclear if Tehran truly understands the message the international community is sending since not all members of the world are abiding by international law and the sanctions that are currently in place. Because of this and the lack of direct communication between Tehran and Washington the information element of national power also fails the Feasibility portion of the FAS test.

As for the *Acceptability* of the strategy of this option being worth the cost, the answer is yes. The cost to stop a state that openly supports terrorism and could have a nuclear capability is a cost that the public is willing to pay. The public, both domestic and international, also support any efforts to restart and ultimately achieve a Middle East Peace.

The case for additional actions would need to be increased to counter the risk from the Feasibility element of not having enough time to stop the production of nuclear weapons. Two other elements of national power need to be addressed. The first is the

diplomatic effort. As addressed earlier in this paper, the United States has no current direct talks with Iran. Meanwhile, both Russia and China do and they are critical in the effort to get Tehran to follow the rules and stop its nuclear ambitions. Diplomacy is highlighted in the U.S. NSS and will play a major role in ensuring that Tehran understands what it needs to have economic sanctions lifted.

The information element of national power could support both the economic and diplomatic elements of national power by having regional partners aid the United States in direct talks. This approach would be acceptable to the U.S. public and by international partners, as it would be a clear sign that the United States is willing to talk more than act unilaterally, like it did in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Additionally, the element of national power that needs to be part of the strategy is the use of military force. The military element of national power has always been a forcing function in compelling others, Iran in this case, to play by the rules. I do not believe the U.S. public; Congress or the international community will support this effort. The U.S. public is facing increasing financial hardship and dealing with the cost, both in lives and money, of fighting two other wars, which have reduced the acceptability of the U.S. public to accept the option of military power to persuade Tehran to not seek a nuclear capability. Meanwhile, the United States is still recovering from international dissatisfaction following its unilateral operations in Iraq in 2003.

While the tools do exist for economic, diplomatic and information elements of national power to be successful, the reliance on others to carry the message and their willingness to fully support these elements is currently failing. Also, the inability to use military force as an element of national power limits the potential for effectiveness of the

Acceptability portion of the FAS test. Because of this the current strategy fails Acceptability.

Suitability for this option is possible because the tools to stop a country like Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability do exist and have been successful in the past. However, Iran must be willing to accept this option or be forced to accept it. This makes the cost or risk associated with this strategy high as time goes by without convincing Iran to not pursue a nuclear capability. The risk of getting both Russia and China to agree to this strategy is of major concern. Additionally, the lack of a credible threat of the use of force (military element of national power), due to both U.S. public and international opinion undermines the suitability of this option. Without a military option, the regime in Iran does not see this enforcement element as convincing. By not having Russia and China's support or the acceptability to use military force makes the current U.S. strategy fail.

Risk Assessment. Because of the risk involved in relying on others, principally Russia and China, to make the U.S. strategy work, this strategy would fail in the time required to achieve success; the measure of success would be stopping Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability. Additionally, without the ability to enforce economic sanctions by the use of force (military element of national power), the risk associated with the current NSS is unacceptable, making failure likely.

Recommended U.S. Strategy.

To get to the vision of the 2010 NSS, "Promote a Responsible Iran," the USG needs to counter Iranian efforts in the Levant, among other places. To do this, the United States needs to increase its diplomatic, information, military and economic (DIME) elements of national power in the Levant to Syria, Lebanon and the

Palestinians. This effort would get to some of the sub-elements of the 2010 NSS of nuclear issues, terrorism, threats against its neighbors, access to energy and integration of the region into global markets.

To highlight this option I am recommending a new strategy of engagement with Iran's allies in the Levant and will conduct a FAS test on this new strategy. We should engage Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians directly by using the diplomatic, information, military and economic elements of national power to counter Iran's same efforts.

U.S. DIME Efforts Toward Syria. Diplomatically the United States, having finally returned an Ambassador to Syria, needs to capitalize on this senior diplomatic official by conducting direct talks with senior Syrian officials. With an Ambassador present in Syria, we can now open direct talks at the appropriate level and expand our current communications. Without direct communications at the senior level the SARG does not take the USG seriously. Moreover, the presence of an Ambassador will provide direct feedback to the U.S. President to facilitate change in the current U.S. policy toward Damascus.

The information aspect of the relationship between the United States and the SARG is very difficult to understand. The information element of power hinges directly on the diplomatic effort. Current U.S. information efforts are perceived as all negative by the SARG.

There is currently no military relationship between the SARG and the USG. This element of power should and could be opened by focusing on security cooperation. This would benefit both by improving military capabilities of the SARG to secure its own

borders to reduce the smuggling of terrorists and contraband thereby addressing mutual concerns of its neighbors and U.S. allies. Additionally, the effort could be used to highlight the current relationship the United States has with many of Syria's neighbors and bring the SARG in as a participant in this regional alliance. Other options include but are not limited to those outlined in the *Guidance on Employment of the Force 2008*.²⁹ While this change in policy would require both USG and Israeli acceptance, it would open another channel to Damascus ultimately countering its relationship with Tehran.

Economic relations between the United States and the SARG are nonexistent. USG economic ties to the SARG are focused completely on sanctions against the Syrian regime. Again, we have no framework to allow the SARG to reverse the current economic sanctions and executive orders.³⁰ Also, Iran is not being countered by its endeavor to replace U.S. economic efforts ultimately increasing Tehran's economic status with Syria.

U.S. DIME Efforts Toward Lebanon. While the United States is engaging the government of Lebanon and is working military to military relations with the LAF the extent and financial support to the LAF is small in comparison with what Iran is providing to Lebanese Hezbollah; both the armed wing and the political wing. The USG should immediately increase its DIME efforts across the board with the Government of Lebanon to counter the effort Iran is providing. Additionally, the USG should continue to focus these efforts directly toward the National Government and the LAF while placing restrictions on any support toward Lebanese Hezbollah.

U.S. DIME Efforts Toward Palestinians. While the USG does have direct talks with the Palestinian Authority, diplomatically this effort is very subdued so as not to alienate our Israeli ally. While this is important a better balance is needed to help establish security and stability while countering Iranian efforts. Additionally the current U.S. military-to-military efforts are with the PNSF elements in the West Bank. There is currently no effort with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip where Iran's monetary influence outpaces USG efforts. Achieving a two-state solution will require much greater security capabilities for the Palestinians. As previously mentioned the amount of economic aid to Palestinians in the West bank is increasing, but there is no effort to counter r Tehran's aid, which is directed almost exclusively to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

Effectiveness (FAS Test). The *Feasibility* of this recommended strategy can be accomplished within the contemplated time because there is no time limit associated with this effort. By opening up dialogue with Syria and expanding it with Lebanon and Palestinians we can "reverse" the trend of Tehran's dominance with key governments in the Levant.

As for *Acceptability*, the strategy would be worth the cost because anything the United States adds will counter what Tehran is providing. The United States has the financial tools and assets to counter Iran's efforts and should take every step to do so. There are also several steps the United States can reverse to assist these governments even more if they show progress.

Suitability for the option is also a yes because the tools to work with each government do exist and many are being used already. The United States just needs to

expand on current capabilities which in turn will counter Iran's efforts in the region. This directly ties back into the new NSS making this option suitable. By using this recommended strategy some of the sub-elements of the NSS (terrorism, threats against its neighbors, and integration of the region into global markets) will be accomplished (pass the FAS test) because the element of time and the resources to execute the strategy do exist. Additionally, any advancement made on other sub-elements would be progress as outlined in the NSS.

While this proposed strategy may not achieve the single most important concern highlighted in the NSS of nuclear proliferation, the current strategy will not achieve it either. However, countering Iran's influence in the Levant using the Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic elements of national power will advance other elements of the NSS as well as "containing" and "isolating" Iran.³¹

Conclusion

The United States has been too focused on the single goal of having Iran abandon its nuclear weapons programs. U.S. policy must also address the other stated ends of an Iran that does not support terrorism or export the Islamic Revolution, that does not pose a threat to its neighbors and that respects the universal human rights of its citizens. Iranian efforts to expand its influence in the Levant collide directly with U.S. interests in the region. This competition closely resembles a zero-sum game.

To achieve this larger end, the United States must employ all elements of national power, not just economic power in the form of sanctions. This strategy has not worked because it is overly reliant on a single element of power (economic sanctions) and depends upon the cooperation of other states, Russia and China that do not appear to share our goals and objectives or agree with our chosen means. In addition, their

reluctance to authorize the use of force undermines the credibility of the sanctions regime (that is weak to begin with because of widespread cheating by many countries). Because our policy has been too narrowly focused on a single end, we need to broaden the ways and apply more means (DIME) to increase the likelihood of achieving our policy goals.

To get to the vision of the 2010 NSS, "Promote a Responsible Iran," the current strategy for the Islamic Republic needs to be amended. This recommendation is to counter Iran's strategy in the Levant by using all elements of U.S. national power. This can be accomplished since the tools to work with each government do exist and many are already being used. The United States needs to expand on current capabilities which in turn will counter Iran's efforts in the region tying directly back to the 2010 NSS. Additionally, this recommended strategy would address other sub-elements of the NSS; terrorism, threats against its neighbors, integration of the region into global markets; that the current strategy is not concentrating on.

Endnotes

¹ Shirl McArthur, "A Conservative Estimate of Total Direct U.S. Aid to Israel: Almost \$114 Billion," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (November 2008): 10-11.

² Jeremy M. Sharp, Syria: Background and U.S. Relations, *Congressional Research Service*, April 26, 2010, 11.

³ US Military Aid to Lebanon 'under review,' not blocked, *The Daily Star - Lebanon News*, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=118217#axzz0wjCFUF7E (accessed August 15, 2010).

⁴ Ronald L. Burgess, Jr., *Iran's Military Power*, Statement before the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, (Washington, DC: Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, April 14, 2010, 2.

⁵ Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan, Danielle Pletka, *A Report of the American Enterprise Institute: Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 2008, 3.

⁶ "Iran, Syria Reaffirm Strategic Alliance," Mehr News Agency (Iran), July 20, 2007, available at www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=521098 (accessed September 21, 2010).

⁷ Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, *Congressional Research Service*, January 13, 2010, 30.

⁸ Reva Bhalla, *Syria, Hezbollah and Iran: An Alliance in Flux*, Security Weekly, STRATFOR, October 14, 2010, available at http://www.stratfor.com.ezproxy.usawcpubs.org/weekly/20101013_syria_hezbollah_iran_alliance_flux (accessed October 18, 2010).

⁹ Kenneth Katzman, Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses, *Congressional Research Service*, October 26, 2010, 40.

¹⁰ Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, *Congressional Research Service*, January 13, 2010, 33.

¹¹ Iran–Syria–Hizballah– Hamas: A Coalition Against Nature Why Does it Work?; *The Proteus Monograph Series, Volume 1, Issue 5 May 2008*.

¹² Kenneth Katzman, Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses, *Congressional Research Service*, October 26, 2010, 39.

¹³ Anna Fitfield, "Hizballah Confirms Broad Aid for Hamas," *Financial Times*, May 12, 2009.

¹⁴ *Congressional Budget Justification*, Volume 2, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2011, 86-88.

¹⁵ *Congressional Budget Justification*, Volume 2, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2011, 235.

¹⁶ Jeremy M. Sharp, Syria: Background and U.S. Relations, *Congressional Research Service*, April 26, 2010, 12-13.

¹⁷ Iran: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy, *Congressional Research Service*, January 13, 2010, 31.

¹⁸ Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated on 14 February 2005 when a bomb detonated on his motorcade in Beirut. The first two reports from the United Nations Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC) indicated the Syrian Government may be linked to the assassination. *United Nations Security Council Letter* dated 20 October 2005 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/563/67/PDF/N0556367.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed September 21, 2010).

¹⁹ U.S. Congress, Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Resolution 1017, 109th Congress, 2nd Session, September 28, 2006, 6. .

²⁰ Jim Zanotti, U.S. Security Assistance to the Palestinian Authority, *Congressional Research Service*, June 24, 2009, 4.

²¹ *Congressional Budget Justification*, Volume 2, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2011, 235.

²² Shirl McArthur, "A Conservative Estimate of Total Direct U.S. Aid to Israel: Almost \$114 Billion," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (November 2008): 10-11.

The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, <http://wrmea.org/component/content/article/245-2008-november/3845-congress-watch-a-conservative-estimate-of-total-direct-us-aid-to-israel-almost-114-billion.html> (accessed August 15, 2010).

²³ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 23.

²⁴ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 26.

²⁵ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 24.

²⁶ Al Stolberg, "Making National Security Policy in the 21st Century" in J. Boone Bartholmees ed., *The US Army War College Guide to National Security Issues Vol II*, 2010, 29-46; and US Army War College Department of National Security and Strategy, *National Security Policy and Strategy Course Directive, AY2011, Appendix I*.

²⁷ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 21-22.

²⁸ Paul K. Kerr, Iran's Nuclear Program: Status, *Congressional Research Service*, September 18, 2009, 11.

²⁹ *Guidance on Employment of the Force 2008*, Chapter 5.

³⁰ Jeremy M. Sharp, Syria: Background and U.S. Relations, *Congressional Research Service*, April 26, 2010, 13-14.

³¹ *National Security Strategy*, May 2010, 26.

